

New Restaurant, Marina Could Revitalize Sussex Coastal Town

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SLAUGHTER BEACH, Del.- Nearly a decade worth of work to bring a new restaurant, marina and boat tour service through the coastal community of Slaughter Beach is one step closer to reality.

The Sussex County Council has approved a conditional use application by owner George W. Swain to develop land off of Lighthouse Road by the Delaware Bay. Plans call for a restaurant to seat around 100 people, refurbished boat docks and possibly boat tours, said business partner Peter Russo.

Russo said the project could revitalize the area, bringing jobs and visitors to the small fishing community east of Milford on the Delaware Bay.

"I think the residents would gladly frequent a restaurant that is that nearby," said Slaughter Beach homeowner Cynthia Lyons.

Lyons noted that the closest eatery involved driving several miles into Milford. She said the community could benefit from boaters.

"We certainly wouldn't mind people coming to go out to eat and enjoy the waters," Lyons said. "We have lots of boaters and I think that could bring business into the restaurant."

Russo said developers would like to include boat tours as part of the concept. One idea is to pick up passengers in downtown Milford and sail the Mispillion River to the restaurant and marina in Slaughter Beach. Another proposal would include the DuPont Nature Center on the tour route.

"That's a great idea because we're right on the Mispillion," said John Lyons of Slaughter Beach.

Council approval came with several conditions, including a ban on fuel sales at the site, a limit of 22 boat slips at the marina and a three-year time period to get construction substantially underway, according to meeting minutes.

The sticking point remains a permit from the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control to revamp the existing boat slips at the marina, Russo said.

Planners have downscaled their request from 50 slips to 22 slips. Environmental officials are concerned about the impact on the red knot population and a possible domino effect on horseshoe crabs, Russo said.

A permit that was initially issued in 1991 expired. Russo said developers have been in talks with the state and hope to reach a compromise for a new permit. No word on when that might happen.